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Understanding vulnerability and encouraging young adults to become active citizens through education: the role of adult education professionals

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Abstract

The recent debate on active citizenship and adult education has been strongly underpinned by the discussion on how active citizenship could be exercised in a way that would promote inclusion and participation. The paper focuses on the role of adult educators in encouraging young adults in vulnerable life situations to become active citizens specifically through two empirical cases, from Finland and England (UK). The central questions the paper seeks to answer are: how do adult educators conceptualise vulnerability, and how do they see their role as facilitating young adults' active citizenship through their teaching? The consideration of socio-cultural, socio-economic and political dimensions of active participatory citizenship provides the conceptual lens to explore young adults' participation in different social contexts. The analysis of the case studies supports the argument that active participatory citizenship is indirectly rather than directly included in the education and training of vulnerable young adults. This leads the article to highlight the adult educators' mediation work in facilitating the socio-economic and political dimensions of active participatory citizenship in interaction with the students. Their mediator role is broadly invisible and in contrast with the ideal of adult education as the straightforward path to socio-economic citizenship and employability.

Keywords: Active citizenship, European adult education, English for Speakers of Other Languages programmes, social inclusion, Vocational Education and Training in prison, vulnerable young adults

Introduction

The current approaches to inclusion and participation in the area of adult education (AE) set new demands on the work of adult educators. The inclusion of young adults through the forms of AE has become a significant element on the European policy agenda (Evans & Niemeyer, 2004; Holford, Milana, & Mohorčič Špolar, 2008), strongly shaped by the contemporary debate on active citizenship as a key element for ensuring social cohesion and inclusion in modern democratic societies (Milana, 2008). This article investigates the extent to which these aims can be realized through the active role of adult educators. The interpretation of socio-cultural, socio-economic and political dimensions of *active participatory citizenship (APC)* (Kalekin-Fishman & Pitkänen, 2007) provides the conceptual lens to scrutinise groups of vulnerable young adults (16-30 years) whose specific needs and requirements call for attention in order to facilitate their participation in different social contexts (Kersh & Toiviainen, 2017).

The concern of raising the level of the economic and social skills of the adult population has characterised both national and European policy developments (Saar, Ure, & Holford, 2013). Addressing these complex problems specifically through engaging and re-engaging the adult population in lifelong learning (LLL) and skills development has become an important target of national governments across Europe and globally (Evans, 2009). At the same time, critical voices towards the neo-liberal underpinning of this discourse have strengthened claiming that AE is distanced from its core values (Volles, 2014). The role of AE professionals of today is shaping in this contested field of AE and LLL policies in Europe and beyond.¹

The promotion of active citizenship of young adults, both directly and indirectly, is an area where many AE programmes overlap. Our European wide review (Kersh & Toiviainen, 2017) supported the notion that the development of social, political and economic capabilities of young adults in vulnerable situations can take place through different types of AE and LLL

¹ Conceptual overlap between the terms ‘adult education’ and ‘lifelong learning’ has been recognised in the literature (Aspin, Chapman, Evans, & Bagnall, 2012). In this paper we draw on research by Evans (2009) and consider LLL in its broadest term as ‘learning through the life course’, which encompasses adult education as a configuration of learning throughout life and sets the scene where the AE professionals work (Evans, 2009; Aspin, 2012; Kersh, 2015).

programmes (e.g. vocational education, basic skills classes, second-chance education) in both formal and informal settings (see also Evans, 2009; Jarvis, 2012; Saar, et al. 2013). In addition, the controversial and broad interpretations of active citizenship that emerged from the literature review suggest that there is a need for in-depth empirical research to explore the multifaceted relationships between AE, active citizenship and social inclusion. While recognising the complexity of the notions of social inclusion and citizenship, in this paper, we are not aiming to undertake their broad conceptual review, but rather employ these concepts to contribute to understanding of the empirical phenomena under study, the conceptions of vulnerabilities and of active citizenship, as well as the changing role of AE professionals. Social inclusion is considered to be an important outcome of active citizenship, exercised through political, social or economic participation. The notion of APC is introduced as a working concept in this study.

Research seeking to understand the complex relationships and interdependencies between education, life and an individual's opportunity to exercise his or her active citizenship has been informed by a range of theoretical approaches including global citizenship (Field & Schemmann, 2017), human rights and tolerance (Brooks & Holford, 2009) and welfare states theories (Biesta, 2009; Green & Janmaat, 2011). While these theoretical approaches and studies provide useful windows into the ways in which individuals can develop their civic engagement through a variety of learning and life experiences, there is a gap in the literature exploring the current role of adult educators in promoting active citizenship through their teaching (Egetenmeyer, 2016). This paper seeks to address this gap by considering the potential of AE and, specifically, the ways that adult educators employ to facilitate APC and civic engagement for young adults in vulnerable life situations who may be at risk of social exclusion. For this purpose, we chose a small sample of two contextually different empirical cases, the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programmes in UK and the formal Vocational Education and Training (VET) programme during imprisonment in Finland. Through comparing two different cases, we aim to uncover some common features related to adult educators' approaches to understanding and addressing vulnerabilities in different contexts and situations.

The central questions the paper seeks to answer are: The central questions the paper seeks to answer are: *How do adult educators conceptualise vulnerability, and how do they see their role as facilitating young adults' APC through their teaching?*

While recognizing the sensitivity surrounding the concept of vulnerability, this study highlights the empowerment of young adults in different situations of vulnerability (United Nation Development Programme (UNDP), 2014) rather than using vulnerability as a label to define our target groups. Hence, AE is a possible means to address vulnerability and build

resilience of young people with the aim of promoting their APC (Edumap, 2017). The paper will start with a discussion of the interpretation of active citizenship in the context of social inclusion through AE and will consider the role of LLL and its discourses. Subsequently, the role of AE professionals in promoting APC will be discussed drawing on literature and the findings of the EduMAP desk study (Kersh & Toiviainen, 2017). Context, methodology and the two cases drawn from the EduMAP research are presented in the section that follows conceptual discussion. The findings on the role of adult education professionals are presented in four thematic sections. The paper will conclude with a summary and discussion on the main findings concerning the role of adult educators and some recommendations for policy and practice and directions for future research.

AE discourses and the new approaches to active citizenship

The recent debate on active citizenship and AE has been underpinned by the discussion on how active citizenship could be exercised in a way that would promote social justice, inclusion and participation and what the contribution of different forms of AE and LLL might be (Jarvis, 2014). The relationship between AE and the promotion of active citizenship has been influenced by both the LLL discourses and the demands and challenges of society. In this paper, our theoretical framework has been informed by the changing notion of active citizenship, its implications for AE, and the ways adult educators perceive this concept and promote it within educational settings.

The conventional understanding of citizenship as a legal status encompassing civic and political dimensions (Marshall, 1977) and a set of legal rights and responsibilities has been extended to go beyond this interpretation, specifically aiming to address new social demands such as the need for economic adaptability, competence and social cohesion, which presupposes some active dimension of citizenship. The concept of active citizenship was introduced to include individual involvement in participatory democracy, with a greater focus on citizens' involvement in decision making and policy development (Hoskins, Janmaat, & Villalba, 2012, p. 9).

The new social demands and discourses of LLL and AE in the last two decades have been both shaped and influenced by political, social and economic development in Europe and globally. The two powerful discourses have played a prominent role in setting the vision of LLL in contemporary society. One discourse has been strongly influenced by neoliberal trends, justifying the economic value of LLL: the more we learn, the more we earn (Evans, 2009).

Another influential discourse has stemmed from current social and political challenges, migration and the influx of refugees across Europe (Evans & Niemeyer, 2004; Hoskins et al, 2012; Kersh & Toiviainen, 2017). The implications for LLL have involved a refocusing of AE programmes to emphasise the provision of skills that would enable adults to adapt to their new or existing environments and overcome political, economic or social challenges through social and economic inclusion, which presupposes engagement as an active citizen. In line with this vision of LLL, the strong interdependency between civic values and learning has been promoted increasingly through AE programmes both in Europe and beyond. In the research literature, facilitating LLL and inclusion through AE has been identified as related to a range of factors, including the significance of learning contexts and spaces, skills and competence development (Tynjälä, Virtanen, Klemola, Kostiainen, & Rasku-Puttonen, 2016) and encouraging young adults to become active citizens.

As noted by Milana (2008), current discourses on democratic citizenship embedded in education policy and practice within European Member States are unavoidably intertwined in a broader discourse on European active citizenship. The GRALE III report has similarly underlined the role of AE for civic and citizenship skills, specifically stressing evidence that AE can enable citizens to become more active and resourceful members of their communities and to become more tolerant of diversity and cultural heritage (GRALE III, 2016). At the same time, the concept of citizenship has been described as linking the different domains of employment, education and ‘life in general’ in its various personal and social configurations (Further Education Funding Council, 2000:4). Field and Schemmann (2017) helpfully add that the idea of active citizenship by no means excludes discussions of rights (and obligations), but is additionally concerned with the ways in which individuals and groups participate in the processes by which decisions are made about their lives. This notion of participation brings attention to an important configuration of active citizenship, which presupposes both active and participatory engagement of individuals. This involves learning, in, through, and for citizenship.

AE professionals’ role in promoting APC

The new vision and transformative trends in AE globally have consequently placed new demands on AE providers. Therefore, providing relevant learning opportunities for adult learners with diverse and changing needs has become an important challenge for AE requiring a high degree of involvement and initiative of adult educators. The role of an adult educator

has been changing to reflect new social and economic requirements, in which adult educators are faced with the complex task of adjusting teaching to learning (Wang & Sarbo, 2004). In this context, the role of the adult educator becomes twofold: to provide knowledge and skills related to their subject and specialism, and to contextualise such knowledge and skills in economic, social and political dimensions relevant to strengthening adults' participation in society and communities. For educators this often involves moving to a position where they create an atmosphere of inclusion (Barrett, 2017).

Our desk study that covered the review of research and policy papers on AE of the 28 EU countries and Turkey (Kersh & Toiviainen, 2017) has indicated that the task of AE to promote active citizenship is weakly recognized and conceptualised. Connected to this, the role of adult educators as facilitators of active citizenship appears to be somewhat vague and not clearly defined in the literature. In this paper we argue that the broad definition of the concept of APC provides a useful framework to consider the ways educators contribute to young adults' inclusion, specifically, through enhancing their participation in political, social and economic arenas. Different dimensions of active citizenship have characterised implicitly, rather than explicitly, AE programmes and initiatives across the European countries.

Our notion of *the APC* (EduMAP, 2017; Kalekin-Fishman & Pitkänen, 2007) includes three complementary dimensions:

- socio-cultural dimension that focuses on the development of social competences and social capital;
- socio-economic dimension that relates to employment (e.g. developing employability skills and access to social benefits);
- political dimension that encourages civic and political participation (e.g. running for boards, neighbourhood activities).

In facilitating social inclusion of vulnerable young adults and developing their skills related to these three dimensions, educators need to take into account and understand multiple vulnerabilities as well as diversities of their target groups (Canning, 2011; Court, 2017). With the exception of programmes for newly arrived migrants and/or refugees, the majority of AE courses do not demonstrate an explicit focus on citizenship education or citizenship skills (Kersh & Toiviainen, 2017). Engaging vulnerable young people through AE has predominantly been related to addressing specific problems (e.g. poor literacy level or unemployment) defined by current national, political, social or economic agendas in Europe. In sum, the potential of AE for promoting active citizenship lies in providing learners with civic, economic and social

skills in a LLL perspective, and facilitating their career aspirations and life chances. AE can provide a holistic approach to support young adults at risk, which calls for special capabilities of AE professionals.

Context and Methodology

Context

Our data are drawn from the EduMAP project (EU/Horizon2020)² that aims to advance our understanding of the current and future impact of AE on learning for APC in Europe. Belonging to the YOUNG programme³ the EduMAP is specifically focusing on the extent to which the AE policies and practices facilitate and promote the social inclusion of young adults living in vulnerable life situations. The EduMAP fieldwork involved undertaking individual and focus group interviews in 19 EU countries and Turkey. The interviews were carried out with learners, educators and policy-makers representing selected “good practices” of AE, in total 40 cases across EU and Turkey. In this paper, data from two countries, namely England (UK) and Finland, offer variety and points of comparison in order to reflect on the changing role of adult educators working with vulnerable young adults.

Case 1: ESOL programme (UK)

ESOL is a government-funded nationwide programme. In recent years, the current political, economic and social changes and challenges have brought about widespread recognition of the importance of ESOL provision, as a tool for both social and economic inclusion of adults. The courses of *English for Speakers of Other Languages* (ESOL) in an Adult Education College in England traditionally aim to provide English-language skills for non-native speakers, specifically targeting those newly arrived in the UK, such as refugees and migrants. The ESOL qualification is accepted as evidence of English-language proficiency for settlement and naturalisation. As noted by Court (2017), evidence points to a ‘linguistic penalty’ experienced by people with lower levels of English in terms of access to employment, getting lower-skilled jobs and earning less.

² cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/200113

³ cordis.europa.eu/programme/rcn/664962

Apart from economic disadvantages, there are other barriers migrants and refugees may face, including public hostility, poor and insecure housing, and risk of social isolation. Although the UK political agenda has emphasised the importance of integration of migrants and refugees (HM Government, 2018), in reality, immigration status often produces inequalities in educational and employment opportunities (Oliver & Hughes, 2018). A significant shift in UK debates regarding multiculturalism and nationhood, prompted by concerns over extremism and terrorist threats (Ager & Strang, 2008) has contributed to the negative perceptions of migrants and asylum seekers within the UK. Experiences of recently arrived migrants and refugees bring attention to the significance of language as one of the key factors for migrants to get access and participate in social, economic and cultural life of their host societies (Burns & de Silva Joyce, 2007; Chiswick & Miller, 1992).

Since 2013, there has been an increase in the level of the language requirement for naturalisation and settlement, also supplemented by the Life in the United Kingdom (UK) citizenship test (LITUK). This political agenda placed a higher responsibility on ESOL provision to teach British values and facilitate active citizenship for the learners. ESOL educators, especially those working with adults in vulnerable situations, need to possess a range of competencies, including both professional competencies and more personal skills. Our respondents representing the ESOL programmes have noted that while working with vulnerable young adults, one needs to possess a range of soft skills such as empathy, patience and compassion, specifically, as their work involves engaging with adults who may be in vulnerable situations.

Case 2: VET during imprisonment (Finland)

Vocational education and training programmes organised in prison (Kuusipalo, Hyytiä, Koskela, & Niiranen, 2018) can be seen as linked to the overall aim of preventing recidivism and integrating individuals to normality, employment and livelihood after a prison sentence. Still, the contents and requirements of the VET programmes follow the national curriculum and produce the same qualifications as studies outside prison. The students are criminal sanction clients who generally fall below average in terms of education level, socio-economic and occupational status and employment, and are at risk of social marginalisation (Aaltonen, Kivivuori, & Martikainen, 2011). Barriers of learning, such as substance abuse, mental health problems and learning difficulties, feature more prominently among prisoners compared to the rest of the population (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2012, 9-10). The share of

inmates with foreign-language and foreign-born backgrounds is increasing in prisons, like in society at large; their learning possibilities are further restricted by the lack of knowledge of local language.

The Ministry of Education and Culture grants authorisation to educational actors who wish to offer education in prisons. These are regular educational providers that also operate outside prisons. Formal requirements for teachers are also the same. In addition, educational activity inside prisons is a multi-professional effort of teachers, prison labour supervisors, and criminal sanctions agency officers representing different sets of competences and qualifications. The EduMAP researchers distinguished three types of qualifications necessary for educators working in prisons: formal pedagogical qualifications, knowledge of subject matter and specific non-formal qualifications and readiness to work under pressure in challenging surroundings (Kuusipalo, et al. 2018).

Funding of AE programmes is competitive and seems to favour large entities and target groups. This has not encouraged education providers to direct their efforts to relatively small vulnerable groups, such as prisoners, and, among them, even smaller target groups of female prisoners and prisoners with foreign-language backgrounds. However, the recent VET reform has introduced several measures to strengthen the provision of VET in prisons. Through the reform, authorisations to provide VET in prison were redistributed, cooperation between providers is now officially expected and the state's compensation rates to education providers operating in prisons have been raised. There are now signs of joint development initiatives among the educators to tackle some of the known problems of VET offering in prisons (Kuusipalo, et al. 2018).

Methods and data

The findings of this article present a comparative analysis of the interview data drawn from the two cases described above, 7 interviews related to the ESOL provision, 9 interviews of VET. These interviews were extracted from the EduMAP data repositories containing codified transcriptions of all interviews of the 40 cases. The two cases have been selected to identify some common characteristics of adult educators' approaches to vulnerabilities in diverse educational contexts. Particularly, the second and the third authors were in charge of the data collection in UK and Finland, respectively, which increases the reliability of the interpretations in a less studied context (Merriam, 1998).

In order to answer the research questions, we analysed the data under the codifications of “Definitions and conceptions of vulnerability”, “Active Participatory Citizenship” (APC), “Development of APC competences”, and “AE practitioner competences and qualifications”. We identified the key excerpts of each code to address the critical points of comparison. By choosing the critical points we do not mean to carry out comprehensive programme-level comparison of the cases, but restrict comparisons to the specific themes identified and related to the research questions. This kind of thematic comparisons across cases enable contextually grounded, generalizable findings in qualitative research even when using a small sample of cases (Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003). We thematised and named four critical points of comparison, which are analysed next. The analysis is data driven, which means that the theoretical discussion of the findings follows in the concluding section. The speakers of the excerpts are named ‘ESOL 1/UK - ESOL 7/UK’ and ‘VET 1/Finland - VET 9/Finland.’ Due to the limited space, the excerpts are representative examples; not all informants are speaking in the excerpts of this article.

Research ethics

The EduMAP data management has been ensured to follow the European level and each country’s official research ethical regulations including the awareness of the sensitivity of the research topic, and the respect of privacy and anonymity of the informants. The participants received information (interpreted or translated, when needed) of the research and signed a consent form before the interviews.

Findings

Working with vulnerable young adults: understanding vulnerabilities

Our argument thus far is that providing education to the groups of young adults considered as vulnerable currently in Europe changes the role of adult educators. We started the analysis by asking, how adult educators understand and address vulnerabilities in these particular contexts. Adult educators working with refugees and migrants (the UK case) see the specific vulnerability of this target group stemming from factors such as lack of English-language skills, being in an unfamiliar social setting of a foreign country and feeling isolated, experiencing an inability to communicate effectively with the local population and as a result, being economically and socially disadvantaged.

Excerpt 1

I think the vulnerability is because they are very worried about somebody else in the family and they're struggling. And I think, you know they're all more or less vulnerable because they're all struggling with language in a strange country and that does make them... I'm sure I would feel very vulnerable too in that situation. And they're all... most of them, not all actually but most are struggling with very low incomes. So you know that's another vulnerability. And I've always found both in [another adult learning centre] and in this class that housing is a huge issue for a lot of people, decent housing. (ESOL 2/UK)

Being aware of multiple vulnerabilities experienced by young adults educators come to understand barriers and challenges faced by the learners. Similarly, adult educators who work with VET in prison (the Finland case), see the connection between students' vulnerability, their diverse learning difficulties, and educational histories and criminal backgrounds. Naturally, living in involuntary isolation from the rest of the society is another general source of vulnerability discussed by the educators.

Excerpt 2

Motivation is not necessarily the problem, but, then, thinking of their social background; maybe social behaviour isn't [adequate] - I remember one inmate saying in an interview, [...] that s/he has been here so long that s/he doesn't know how to talk with you. They speak their own language and stuff – there are so many different types of people. Almost everyone have learning disorders of some degree, for different reasons, drug use or something else. And maybe even criminal life has started because of having learning disorders – you don't manage otherwise, so you start with- (VET 9/Finland)

The excerpts above indicate that the perception and understanding of vulnerabilities are contextually specific. We further found that the adult educators consider their role multidimensional, encompassing teaching their subjects and providing additional support, guidance and mentoring for vulnerable young adults. Through facilitating their learning and engagement, educators wish to help the students in addressing at least some of the vulnerabilities. In the context of the ESOL case, reflecting on actual and potential vulnerabilities is perceived as a starting point for educators, enabling them to shape their approaches for the learners. Skills like empathy, compassion and understanding have been described as really important in the work with young adults in vulnerable situations. The types and degree of vulnerabilities may vary from learner to learner, and some vulnerabilities are

difficult to uncover, which highlights the building of mutual trust and respect between the learner and the education, as an important element of work with vulnerable young adults.

Excerpt 3

It's quite difficult to get a sense of that [vulnerabilities] just from teaching. I mean I had last year, it took me quite a while to get to know what the diversities were but now I've had more time in this class I've had a man who is from [a Middle East country] whose wife was killed in an accident I think actually and had a 2-year-old son and came here I think after she was killed. And he clearly struggles. [...] And another woman I had last year who had quite serious cancer. I think and I would say she was having terrible problems with her children and her husband and, you know I could get that because she would sometimes... it would just be too much for her and she would just break down. (ESOL 1/UK)

Similarly, VET educators in prison stress the importance of the teacher's personality and the ability to relate to the learners' backgrounds and vulnerabilities. Sense of humour and certain boldness in the interaction that takes place in classrooms and work sites are mentioned. In addition, educators emphasise professional ethics and respect to learners regardless of their life styles and possible serious crimes in the past.

Excerpt 4

The thing is, that it has to be people who do it with their hearts and want to help this particular target group. It is not enough to be a vocational special needs teacher or to have book knowledge about the subject. [...] One can never ignore the fact that the student has to be respected, whether adult or young, and especially with adults, it is enormously important, no matter what [their] life has been until we meet... (VET 4/Finland)

Interviews indicate that educators perceive working with vulnerable adults as a co-constructive process that requires continuous boundary crossing between a range of settings and contexts. Boundary crossing is both social-spatial, across multi-professional and every-day life spheres, and temporal movement between the learners' past, present and future.

Adult educators highlight different types of skills and experiences ranging from educational expertise to personal dispositions. Dealing with vulnerability contributes to the development of their unique approaches in their teaching practices. The process of education, as our data indicate, involves drawing on both the learners' past and present experiences. Understanding personal vulnerabilities, learning needs and individual biographies and learning histories helps educators to encourage their students' participation and engagement. The next sections will discuss the extent to which different dimensions of APC, identified through our

desk research, manifest themselves through our cases in two different contexts: Finland and England.

The socio-cultural dimension of APC: how can social competences and values be promoted through AE?

The role of adult educators in promoting the socio-cultural dimension of APC relates to the target groups' needs to develop a range of communication skills and to learn how to act in the current society. In the ESOL programmes, the socio-cultural dimension is associated with equipping learners with English language skills, to enhance their confidence and facilitate communication within different social environments. Reflecting on 'what learning English can do for the learners', the tutors highlighted being 'engaged, and feeling more confident in the environment', as well as 'just going about daily life and coping with what's thrown at them here', as one of the AE practitioners puts it. AE tutors encourage the students to see active citizenship through the lens of engagement and participation. In their teaching practices, AE tutors try to relate socio-cultural skills devolvement to the learners' contexts, motivations or achievements. Being able to communicate more effectively within a range of environments and contexts is one of the most significant outcomes of the course, according to the learners (Kersh & Huegler, 2018).

Excerpt 5

[...] as well as giving people the language...[ESOL] is also developing the kind of, you know you might call citizenship type skills that actually help to change things again and understand it from ways that there might be around doing that. (ESOL 6/UK).

Developing socio-cultural skills may be exercised both implicitly and explicitly. Within the ESOL context (UK) the socio-cultural aspects relate to both teaching and learning of the English language (e.g. vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar) and a more embedded use of language and communication enabling the learners to employ their newly acquired skills in specific situations. This is illustrated by various activities incorporated in the lessons, such as using the language to practice a visit to a GP (medical general practitioner), neighbourhood office or job interview.

In the case of VET (Finland), socio-cultural aspects of AE relate to the ways of practicing vocational activity, but this requires teaching and learning "the basics" of, for example, the technological development of society outside a prison.

Excerpt 6

...above all, active citizen has to have understanding of how we act as citizens, and sometimes [...] we really start from the basics. This means studying how things are nowadays handled through computers, and that's why I'm here, that we learn together to fill in [forms] online... (VET 8/Finland)

Going beyond the course curricula requirements, educators may see their role in providing guidance and support on broader issues, which will help their learners integrate better into their society and community or facilitate the transition from institutionalisation to civil life.

Excerpt 7

Quite often on occasions I have ended up to be a bit of a social worker myself, you know, and with the lady who had cancer, I spent quite a lot of time advising her about finding a school for her child who was very unhappy at the school she was in. So you have a lot of informal conversations that just hopefully support people a bit. (ESOL 1/UK)

Excerpt 8

...quite normal issues in society that have changed [during imprisonment], sure we have to help the chaps actively, in how things are managed, what you do and how you behave. Because behaviour is totally different, in prison hierarchies and everything else, [...] they must be really guided to living, in general, how we are and live. (VET 9/Finland)

The last quotations illustrate a significant point about the perception of the role of the adult educator, as being multifaceted and multidimensional. The interviews with AE practitioners suggest that in working with vulnerable groups educators see their own role as one that extends beyond their role as tutor or instructor, often acting as a mentor or counsellor, sometimes even as a social or youth worker. In both of our cases, the tutors make a point that the development of social skills of vulnerable students is an important building block in education and the prerequisite of their participation in social, economic and political life.

Socio-economic dimension: 'the more we learn the more we earn'?

In line with the neoliberal discourse of LLL discussed above, the socio-economic participation of young adults has been perceived as one of the most important targets to ensure their engagement. Educators see their role in facilitating the life chances of young adults, and one

way they can do this is through the development of students' socio-economic skills, which would enable young adults to enter the labour market. Being unemployed is considered to be a significant vulnerability, which presents a barrier to participating and exercising active citizenship. The interviews with learners and educators indicate that those newly arrived in the country consider economic participation (including both being employed or undertaking some voluntary jobs) as a way to contribute to their community and society.

Excerpt 9

Well I suppose anyone who is not in work and is more on the fringes of society, so they are vulnerable in this particular environment. But they are also vulnerable because they have to understand how services work [...] or the networks of people that they're in contact with. So the inherently more vulnerable are immigrants ... the other fact is that a lot of them are women and lots of them are at home on their own. (ESOL 1/UK educator)

Socio-economic skills are perceived as those helpful for finding a job or improving their career and personal development in the workplace. Tutors working on the ESOL programme note that there is a strong interdependency between employability, engagement and participation. Entering employment makes young adults more confident and socially engaged. While acknowledging that employment is not the only and exclusive path towards active citizenship, educators stress that for their target groups, employment often provides an environment that becomes a starting point for their engagement and social interaction.

In the vocational education in prison (VET), early access to labour market cannot be the primary objective. Employability is important, but it is intertwined with and often dependent on personal goals, reaching crimeless and drug free life, etc. Educators regularly point out that the socio-economic goals are mediated by the student's identity building, self-confidence and self-directedness.

Excerpt 10

...what is the ultimate goal in this: that you find, in a way, the identity to do that job, [plus] you want and are capable to support yourself. For example, this guy [who possibly in two years] gets to civil life. So, it really makes a difference that you have a trade and you know that you are capable to do that job. And even a building trade [with possibilities for higher salary even in production work]. In that sense, a good trade, of course, economic-, or what was the word? Socio-?[Socio-economic.] (VET 6/Finland)

Taking the perspective of identity building brings the sense of proportion to the educator's role in helping students manage socio-economically. Teachers expand the meaning of "learning for

earning” during imprisonment by integrating the elements of personal growth and time perspective into the young students’ vocational learning.

Civic and political participation: how can young adults be motivated towards civic and political participation?

Of the three dimensions of APC (socio-cultural, socio-economic and political), the political dimension has been recognised as the most challenging to be promoted through education of vulnerable young adults (e.g. Hoskins, et al, 2012). The tutors highlight some barriers to political participation, and some of them relate strongly to the other two dimensions: socio-cultural and socio-economic.

For ESOL learners, as noted by the tutors, the socio-cultural dimension provides a foundation for political interest and potential engagement. Some strategies employed by the ESOL tutors include starting from using and explaining relevant terms and concepts, such as ‘voting’, ‘election’, ‘democracy’, and using a number of different approaches to illustrate the meaning of these concepts. The educators make a strong point that the interpretation of citizenship needs to be contextualised in specific situations and embedded into the needs, ambitions and capabilities of their target group. The interpretation of citizenship would often be related to developing skills that would enable vulnerable adults to integrate into society step-by-step, through empowering them and facilitating their skills to deal with the issues, problems and challenges that happen in their daily life.

Excerpt 11

I would interpret it [citizenship] in different ways depending on the level of English that I’m teaching. For example, at a Level 2 class [...] we looked at tenant strategy. And so what we were looking at were housing terms or [topics] around housing. [...] But on another level maybe wanting to teach things about for example what does the word ‘to vote’ mean, you know, how do you access public services, your kind of rights as a citizen and you are responsible as a citizen. (ESOL 1/UK)

One ESOL tutor reflects on her own strategies to develop the learners’ politico-legal competencies, including civic awareness. Introducing aspects of British culture provides a context for raising civic and political awareness for learners. However, as noted by one of the tutors (ESOL3/UK) learners need to be introduced to various civic and citizenship concepts gradually, taking into account not only their own cultural backgrounds and personal experiences, but also the level of their knowledge of English. Interviews with educators further suggest that recognising the learners’ own cultural heritage and backgrounds may provide a

meaningful approach in this context. The tutor, for example, addresses this issue through highlighting some parallels between values in the UK and the learners' countries of birth:

Excerpt 12

I tend to say if there are significant days in the British calendar, like Remembrance Day or Bonfire Night, even with that low-level [of English] class I do some things on that. [--] And obviously we're doing that and I talk about their Remembrance Days and the equivalent national sorts of festivals that they have in their countries, but I will try and interpret those for them so they know what's around them in a sense. (ESOL 1/UK)

Comparing the VET case (Finland) with the findings of ESOL (UK), political dimension reveals the most striking differences between the adult educators' views in these two AE programmes. The data suggests that a prison as a learning environment distances both students and teachers from the issues of civic and political participation. In addition, as discussed in the context of ESOL, the political dimension is strongly mediated through socio-cultural and socio-economic intentions of education. When asked about active citizenship, the educators do not seem to appreciably elaborate on how to motivate young adults to reach politico-legal competencies.

Excerpt 13

Well, I think that maybe the requirements are on a lower level, but referring to what I already said, the idea in some sense could be that somehow that person is better prepared to participate in the matters of society or take care of the obligations of society – that “light would be on in the house,” something like this. This is the way of the least nuisance. (VET 7/Finland)

In the light of this data, teachers of both ESOL and VET programmes relate the enhancement of political dimension of citizenship to the “level” of their students' language skills (ESOL) and other learning capabilities (VET) in the particular vulnerable situation that the learners are living while taking the courses.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper scrutinised the role of current AE professionals who are working with the groups of vulnerable young adults. The analysis drew on the European wide study of the EduMAP project (Kersh & Toiviainen, 2017) and focused on case studies from UK and Finland, seeking to explore and thematically compare, how adult educators conceptualise vulnerability, and how they see their role as facilitating vulnerable young people's active participatory citizenship (APC) through education. The interpretation of socio-cultural, socio-economic and political

dimensions of APC (Kalekin-Fishman & Pitkänen, 2007) provided the conceptual lens to understand better how adult educators address multiple vulnerabilities in the context of AE. Our desk study has suggested that the dimensions of APC characterise implicitly, rather than explicitly, AE programmes and initiatives for vulnerable groups across the European countries (Kersh & Toiviainen, 2017). Our theoretical discussion highlighted some influential LLL discourses in defining AE priorities and directions (Evans 2009), and the ways they influence the changing role of an adult educator to reflect new social and economic requirements (Wang & Sarbo, 2004). A deeper empirical exploration of the two cases in different cultural-historical contexts allowed us to explore how AE professionals work with vulnerability and co-create the dimensions of APC of young adults under these circumstances. Our overall recommendation is that the importance of the mediating role of educational professionals needs to be better recognised and taken into account by relevant stakeholders (e.g. course designers and policy makers). Specifically we would like to summarise the following points that support our findings in relation to the significance of the role of adult educators.

First, our findings support the suggestion that adult educators deal with complexity associated with vulnerability by reflecting on, developing and embedding their strategies and interpretations into their professional practices. The role of the adult educators is therefore multidimensional, stemming from the multiplicity of the specific needs, diversity and vulnerabilities, experienced by young adults, both explicitly and implicitly observable. The case studies from Finland and England exemplify two different AE programmes developed and implemented in two different country contexts. However, the notion of working with young adults experiencing vulnerabilities presupposes some common developments. Our cases demonstrate that both economic and social challenges and discourses (Evans, 2009) have contributed to an increased number of young adults suffering from a combination of vulnerabilities. Therefore, adult educators need to find approaches addressing not only visible vulnerabilities (e.g. lack of basic skills) but also those that may be less obvious or apparently hidden (e.g. mental health problems, social deprivation, poverty). The recognition of young people's diversity, rather than treating them as one common target group with predetermined or assumed vulnerabilities and educational needs, becomes an important aspect of the role of AEal professionals as the implementers of training programmes (Canning, 2011; Court, 2017). In this paper, we argue for a recognition of the new role of adult educators, in which they are expected to relate teaching, guidance and support with multiple vulnerability in multi-cultural contexts gradually unfolding for them.

Secondly, adult educators' experience and reflection on vulnerabilities becomes a central element of their professional competency of inclusion strategies that facilitate young adults to become active community members. This notion of becoming more active in a range of environments (e.g. family, community or work) has been cited by our respondents as a starting point for the promotion of active citizenship (cf., Hoskins, et al, 2012). Both the Finnish and English case studies support our desk research findings (Kersh & Toiviainen, 2017) showing that the promotion of the dimensions of APC is indirectly rather than directly integrated in the education and training of vulnerable young adults. Adult educators are aware of the critical importance of introducing the dimensions of active citizenship within the contexts relevant to the learners' personal and professional needs, ambitions and capabilities. Both cases demonstrate how this can be enhanced by developing individualised approaches, creating meaningful relationships with young people, and building trust and reassurance that the programme can help learners move forward. Barrett (2017) points out that this kind of activity can take place through adult educators' reflexive practices which are oriented to the growing diversity of students.

The final remark concerns the implicit-indirect nature of dealing with vulnerability and active citizenship in education and training. Adult educators' professional activity involves a lot of mediation work to link the learning contents to the dimensions of active citizenship in a way that is relevant for the learners, as was discussed above. In addition, the more they gain understanding of the vulnerability of the young adult learners, the more skillful they become in mediating the political and socio-economic dimensions of education by embedding them in the socio-cultural dimensions shared in interaction with the "new" groups of students. Following the Vygotskian sociocultural theorising of learning, human mediation becomes particularly important in the learning contexts characterized by growing multiculturalism (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003). For adult educators in the current European context, mediation work is part of a demanding and gradually emerging professional practice, broadly invisible and in contrast with the ideal of AE policies seeing education as the straightforward path to socio-economic citizenship and employability. With the entrance of new vulnerable groups in Europe and beyond, the future research as well as professional development of the role of adult educators entails a deepening understanding of vulnerability and complex mediation work for the young adult learners' active participatory citizenship.

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